

VZCZCXRO3370  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHIHL #0059/01 1480337  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 270337Z MAY 08  
FM REO HILLAH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1090  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 1156

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000059

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/25/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: ISCI INTRIGUE IN BABIL

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CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth M. Hillas, Team Leader, PRT Babil,  
Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Babil cable.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The former de facto leader and heavyweight in Babil's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) provided insight into his strife-ridden party, panhandled for U.S. support, and faulted the U.S. for not being more actively involved in shaping the provincial political map. Hamza Malallah al-Isawi (Abu Muhammad) contradicted earlier information he had provided that Babil Governor Salam Salih al-Mahdi al-Muslimawi would not be on ISCI's candidate list, but did confirm that ISCI has placed personnel in the Governate Election Office (GEO). END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) Fresh from a trip to Iran and after repeated requests from the PRT, Abu Muhammad agreed to a May 22 meeting on the Regional Embassy Compound in al-Hillah to discuss the status of ISCI in Babil, Governor Salam, and the upcoming elections. For more than two hours, the former de facto ISCI leader in Babil argued feverishly for an open list ballot; called the Governor incompetent and compared him to the devil; described Iranian perceptions of the U.S. threat and Iran's determination to bog down the U.S. in south-central Iraq but acknowledged that Iran's actions do not serve Iraq's interests; and defended the practice of implanting party affiliates on the GEO staff, explaining that all the parties, even the Sadrist Trend, are doing it.

¶4. (C) Contradicting earlier reports that ISCI was forming four slates under the guise of "independents," none of which included the Governor, Abu Muhammad claimed that ISCI will run only one slate in the upcoming provincial elections in Babil. (Comment: We have reason to doubt this claim. As many as four registered political entities claiming to be independent have ISCI-affiliated persons in them.) The Governor should be on the list and may actually lead it, although Abu Muhammad was neither bashful in expressing his disdain for the GC leader nor modest in expressing his ability to remove the Governor from power. He wants to move against the Governor in an, "organized way," but believes it is too late to form a political movement against him, especially if the U.S. is not willing to support (i.e. fund) such an organization.

¶5. (C) Abu Muhammad provided insight into ISCI's inner workings. Despite his references to disagreement and infighting on the part of the provincial and national party leadership, he described a coordinated ISCI approach to the upcoming elections. (Comment: He did not hide his disdain for the Governor and his inner-circle, blaming the Governor for the current tarnished public perception of ISCI, which he deems to be their greatest challenge in the upcoming elections.) He said that ISCI's five constituent parts -- ISCI (political), Badr, Sayid al Shuhada, Hizb'allah al Iraq, and Shahid al Mihrab - all have two representatives on a "vetting committee" in each province that

is charged with proposing a slate of candidates to the party's Baghdad leadership for review and approval. While deference will be given to the provincial committee, the leadership will ultimately designate the candidates, according to Abu Muhammad. Contrary to original reports, the ISCI diehards are fighting for an open slate. Abu Muhammad claimed that the closed slate was vague, marginalized the population, and led to the current "dictatorship." Moreover, a closed slate would portend violence.

¶16. (C) Before the topic of Iranian influence was entertained, Abu Muhammad cast several lines for U.S. support. He said that, "If the U.S. just sits back and watches, it will only be a matter of years before Saddam [Hussain] returns to Iraq." He expressed his frustration with past U.S. support to candidates, arguing that the Americans made, "a lot of bad people rich." His last ditch effort was to turn the tables on the PRT. Referencing the support to the current GC, Abu Muhammad laughed "If I were President George Bush, I would blame you for failing to support my vision."

¶17. (C) ISCI's failures, and not Iran's influence, are the black stain on Hamza Malallah's party. He described Iran's support to not just ISCI, but the Sadr Trend, Hizb'al-Dawa, and many others in Iraq, as an insurance policy. Just days after returning from Iran, he asserted that Iranian policymakers believe the U.S. military "cannot fight on three fronts at one time." Thus, as long as the American's are bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is no opportunity to directly engage Iran militarily.

¶18. (C) If not Iranian or American interference in the provincial elections, what does bother Abu Muhammad? The answer is the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and provincial GEO. While he sees nothing wrong with party implants in the IHEC offices -- according to him, all the major parties are doing the same thing -- he is concerned about security. Abu Muhammad said

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that the level of violence in Babil may not be as bad as in other provinces, but predicted that ISCI will try hard to engage in massive voter fraud and abuse to steal the election. He identified the storage and movement of the ballots as the area of biggest risk. He fears that if reelected, Governor Salam will "work like a devil" to make himself rich, while continuing to neglect the people of Babil.

¶19. (S) Comment: It is unclear whether or not Abu Muhammad, having just returned from Iran, was fishing to see if and how the U.S. might be attempting to influence the elections, or whether he was genuine in his attempts to garner U.S. support for a run against the governor. What was clear was his recent fall from grace. He appears to have fallen from de facto Chairman and representative of the al-Hakim family in Babil to a man fighting for a spot on the ISCI slate for provincial elections, willing to prostitute himself to both Iran and America to garner support for his bid. If his assertions of internal ISCI strife are even half-true, the ISCI leadership will have its hands full in Babil for the upcoming elections.  
HILLAS